

**[Edward Walcott]**

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EDWARD WALCOTT

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Athens, Georgia

Landlord

[S.B.H ornsby?] EDWARD WALCOTT

Edward Walcott was the name on the card above the electric button by the front door, and my ring was promptly answered by Mrs. Walcott. She is a prim little woman, and on this occasion her neat silk frock was protected by a print smock.

“Do come in, my dear,” she said, with an inviting smile. My hostess left me in the living room, while she went to let her husband know that I was there. Glancing about me, I saw beautiful old furniture, some of which I later learned has been handed down from one generation to another in the Walcott family for more than a hundred years. A rare and lovely old blue glass carafe sat on the floor under a mahogany drop-leaf table that has been in this family since 1800. A mortar and pestle, given by Dr. Crawford W. Long discoverer of anesthesia by ether to a member of the Walcott family, was placed on an interesting old bookcase.

Mr. Walcott came in with his wife and invited me into the dining room. “It’s warmer in here,” he explained, as we approached a glowing Franklin heater. When I explained that I had come to hear him tell his experiences in the renting business, he laughed heartily. “Why don’t you ask Miss Annie?” he asked.

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“Miss Annie” is his wife. “She could give you a much better story than I can with all her experiences as a nurse before we married, and then, too, she knows as such about my renting business as I do, if not more. She’s had many and varied experiences since she’s been helping me keep our property rented.”

"Oh, Ed!" she began, "You know how busy I am today. You just go ahead and talk. I'll be glad to help in any way I can though. Just call me and I'll be right in."

"You'll find that dining table a good place to write on," said Mr. Walcott, and as I opened my notebook he continued the conversation. "That table is what I would call a real antique. My grandfather Walcott purchased it in 1800, and it has been in our family ever since. I myself, have eaten off of it 60 years. It's solid mahogany, and we have never had to have a thing done to it. Its construction is remarkable; there's not a nail in it. An expert spent 4 hours looking it over with a flashlight, and he declared that it wasn't made in America. He should know about good furniture for he was apprenticed as a small boy to a manufacturer of fine furniture, and at the time he was in our home he was in his 70th year. Practically all of his life has been spent in the furniture business. Another man offered me a complete dining room suite, the best obtainable, for this one table. Of course I refused the offer. That was in the days when all of us had plenty of money. I doubt if the man who made that offer could pay cash for a loaf of bread now."

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Taking an odd-looking pistol from the mantel, Mr. Walcott inquired, "Would you like to know the history of this?" My knowledge of firearms is limited to almost nothing, and seeing the quizzical look with which I regarded the weapon, he answered the question that I had not voiced. "Sure, it's a real pistol. Take it in your hands and see for yourself."

I begged him to tell me the story of the pistol.

"Well," he said, "this was one of a pair of duelling pistols that my father used to keep in a handsome morocco case in his desk. After our home burned in 1885, we found this one in the back yard, but we never did know what become of the other pistol and the case. This was the pair of pistols used in the duel between Aaron Burr and Alexander A. Hamilton, and the one you see here now was the one fired by Burr to inflict the mortal wound. I suppose you remember reading that Hamilton died as the result of that duel. The pistols

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belonged to Hamilton, and were exactly alike, only the other was for a right-handed man. Aaron Burr was left-handed. If you held this one in your right hand the hammer would obstruct your sight and endanger your marksmanship, but you can hold it in the left hand and sight from the small piece of steel on the right side of the barrel." I had never known before that there was a time when a pair of pistols, like a pair of shoes, were made in "rights" and "lefts."

Mr. Walcott continued: "Now let me tell you how this pistol is operated. It is first loaded with gunpowder and wadded with cotton, then a piece of flint rock, just large enough to fit 4 the [seat?] - that's what that part is called - is placed in it on top of the barrel. This piece of steel is then fastened over the flint, and when the trigger is pulled it produces a spark from the flint, and that spark ignites the powder and causes the explosion. This pistol is of finest steel, and look at that handle! It's mahogany, I'm sure. Now, look closely and read the name of the manufacturer, 'U. & W. RICHARDS.' You remember, no doubt, that Hamilton was an Englishman. These pistols are known as the flint-rock type. How my father came into possession of them, I don't know.

Mr. Walcott's ancestors have been connected with the development of Athens from its pioneer days. His paternal grandfather was the architect who designed some of the oldest of the many notable buildings here, and his maternal grandfather was equally distinguished in his individual enterprises. Mr. Walcott is rather stout, has black hair, and he seems to favor a black broadcloth suit, black felt hat, black shoes, white socks, white shirt and black tie to any other type of attire.

"Talking of buildings," said Mr. Walcott, "I was born in New College on the Franklin campus of the university. Grandfather was one of the builders of New College, and 30 years after it was completed, while the university was closed because of the war, he and his family lived there. My mother was visiting them there when I was born.

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"There were six of us boys, and we always realized what we missed not having a sister. We boys were into everything. In my young days all the houses were enclosed with picket fences, and we had our gateposts named 'twelve' and 'one.' When we had been out at night, next morning at the breakfast table our parents would ask us:

" 'What time did you boys come in last night?'

" 'Between twelve and one,' we always answered.

"We lived on this same street, down there in front of the church. The street was not laid out straight at that time like it is now. It was a part of the old stage route from Athens to Dahlonega, and the coaches wound in and out among the trees. The road in front of our house was higher than the yard. Father had let mother choose between the Ben Hill house and the Thomas house, and she chose the latter. That was where we were reared.

"You can imagine what life around six boys would be like. One of mother's best friends, a fine woman, taught a private school in a building erected for that purpose in her yard. That old house is still standing in the yard of that family's home. When it came time for us to enter school mother's friend told her that she simply couldn't have the six of us for we were so noisy we would ruin her school.

"Well, that didn't keep us from going to school. Father just built a large one-room building on the side of our yard and hired Professor Hudson as tutor. He and father had been in the same 6 company in the Civil War, and so father knew him well and was satisfied that he was quite capable of teaching six noisy boys. It wasn't long before there were so many parents anxious to send their children to our school that father put a partition in our schoolhouse and employed another teacher. He was Professor Orr from Martin Institute. Declamation time, as we called it then, was on Friday afternoons, and we invited our parents to attend and hear our speeches. At the closing exercises in June,

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Professor Hudson awarded a gold medal to the pupil who had maintained the best average throughout the school year.

“Well, instead of us breaking up the other school with our noise, it broke up because all its pupils came over to our school. Mother's friend was a wonderful teacher and a fine person in every respect, and we never had the least idea of making any trouble for her.

“My father was one of the instigators of the public school system in Athens. The first public school was on Meigs Street, and when that old building was torn down in later years, two houses were built from its timbers.

“Father was a great one for raising Jersey cattle, and gave each of us boys a male calf. We rode those calves all over town and probably would have ridden them to Sunday School, but mother wouldn't allow that.

“As for as you could see back of our house was in woods, 7 and in the branch about where Boulevard now is, was ‘the old swimming hole.’ We boys went there every day in summer to swim. Bathing suits were unheard of. We just pulled off our brown check pants and blue check blouses and dove in. Every boy in town learned to swim in that old swimming hole. There was another one on the old Phinizy branch that we loved to swim in too.

“Speaking of clothes, everybody wore cotton checks made in the old Check Mill, in summer. Even my father wore them. However, he had handsome broadcloth suits that he bought on his trips to New York. Winter clothes were of jeans, wool and cotton mixed, and this jeans was manufactured in the same old Check Mill.

“Those were happy, carefree days for children. Every need was taken care of, but children didn't have money to waste like they do now, no matter how much their parents had.

“Dan was the name of one of grandfather's slaves. When he was about eleven years old he accidentally fell into the mill-race at grandfather's cotton factory, and his head was

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so badly mashed that it never grew back into the right shape. When he got old enough to work he became grandfather's coachman. His wife was named Martha, and every Saturday all six of us boys would go out to their house for dinner. Such feasts as Dan and Martha did set before us - fried chicken, ham, and ash cakes, all cooked in an open fireplace, and if you have never eaten ash cakes you have missed the treat of your life.

"Grandfather was one of the first to have an interest in gold mining at Dahlonega. It was a two-day trip from Athens to Dahlonega then, and grandfather made it about twice each year to see after his interests there. His oldest son was up there in charge of the work. When time came to go, two horses were hitched to a spring wagon that was loaded with trunks filled with bedding and food, and a trusted servant was sent on with it a day ahead of the family. He spent the first night at Jefferson, a distance of about 20 miles, and the second night he was scheduled to be in Sugar Hill. For a week before these trips, the coachmen was busy shining up the carriage and all the silver on the harness. The family left in the carriage the day after the wagon set out, and usually overtook it at Sugar Hill.

"Some years ago I took mother to Dahlonega for a day. I picked her up at 9 o'clock in the morning, then stopped by home for my wife and daughter. We arrived at our destination about noon. At 3 o'clock that same afternoon I told mother to get ready as we were leaving for home.

"Why Ed, you must be out of your mind,' she argued, 'you know this a two-day trip.'

" 'Anyway, we're leaving at 3 o'clock,' I told her.

"When we were back in Athens and she got out of my car at her home, the sun was still shining. Turning to me, she said: 'Well, I never thought I'd live to see the day when I could go to Dahlonega and back in one day.'

"One of grandfather's sons followed in his footsteps as a builder. He was one of the three commissioners in charge of the construction of the State Capitol in Atlanta. Did you know

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that's the only State Capitol in the United States that was built within its appropriation? When that building was completed and all accounts paid up, there was a balance of \$3.60 left.

"I believe I've already told you of some of our boyish pranks. What the six of us couldn't think of wasn't worth thinking of. We used to blacken thick ropes and pull them snake-like across the paths in front of courting couples that passed our yard at night. Our thick shrubbery made a grand hiding place for us to crouch in while we manipulated the strings that made the 'snakes' look more life-like. Once we stuffed a long black stocking and pulled it across the path in front of a young Hebrew couple and frightened them out of their wits. You could have heard them yell blocks away. Our parents heard the noise and stopped our fun when they learned that we were causing the racket.

"Dr. Billups was a fine old dentist practicing at Watkinsville. After his death father bought his dental kit and gave it to me. The mahogany case was well equipped for that day and time, and I was just the proudest boy you ever saw. One day I was sitting on our front steps looking through the dental case when a neighbor came by.

" 'Good morning, son! What are you doing?' he asked.

"Waiting for a patient,' I told him, as I hold up the dental case.

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" 'Good!' he exclaimed, 'Come on down to my house and see what's wrong with this tooth that's hurting so bad right now.'

"When we arrived at his house, I had him seated in a chair, and in an exaggerated professional style I took a piece of cotton from the kit, saturated it with oil of cloves and put it in the hollow of the aching tooth. My patient said it stopped the tooth from hurting and he paid me a nickle. That was the first money I ever earned, and from that time on the boys called me 'doc.'



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"The height of my ambition as a boy was to carry water on my head like our old cook, Cindy. Way back of our house, near the spring, we had a well dug that was 62 feet deep, and every morning mother sent all six of us down there with Cindy and John, the gardener, for water. I tried and tried to carry a pail of water on my head, but was never able to accomplish this feat.

"We boys played many a day with the old ram that Mrs. Franklin had installed to pump water into her house. Here were the first waterworks we had ever seen. She had a slave that did nothing else but stand at that old ram all day and pump the water through the lead pipes to her house and gardens. During the war she had those old lead pipes taken up to be made into bullets for the soldiers. That old house has been changed quite a bit since then. At that time the entrance was on the west side of the house. There was even a porte-[cochere?] for the carriages to drive under. Three rooms extended across the front of the house, and now the entrance is in the middle room. The front porch has been added 11 since then. Her porch was on the west side and its columns attracted lots of attention. They were put up just as the trees were when they were cut down - that is, the bark and stubs of the branches were still on them. One of the largest trees I have ever seen was in her back yard. All six of us boys used to clasp hands and try to reach around it, but our six pairs of arms were not long enough to encircle it. The interior of Mrs. Franklin's old house has been changed but little.

"Once when mother sent me to the dry well for something she needed, it was raining and the house girl had to go along with me to carry a lamp so I could see how to get around in that dark place. That was long before we had electric lights. I had to carry an umbrella to keep the rain from putting out the lamp. When we got back to the house I was lowering the umbrella out on the back porch and got it caught in the lamp, which fell to the floor and exploded. The maid saw me through the flames and began yelling, 'Lord, have mercy? Marse Doc done burnt up. He's done daid!' She fainted dead away, and was taken to the servants' house. I wasn't hurt, but I was plenty scared. Father appeared and extinguished

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the fire by turning over a churn of milk on it. All through the night the poor house girl kept wailing, 'Lord, have mercy! I done killed Marse Doc.' Early the next morning I had to go down there and show her that I was alive and all right.

"I have in my possession now some of the old mantle paper made in the old paper mill. My uncle married the daughter of one of 12 the owners of the paper mill. During the Civil war, this mill made the paper that was used for the wads to hold the powder in the guns. These wads were about four inches long and were twisted at both ends. The soldiers hastily bit off one end and rammed the wad into the barrel of the gun with the ramrod. The women made those wads at home. That was just one of the many ways they found to help out during the war. There was another name for those old gun wads, but I've forgotten it now. Quantities of rags were necessary for the manufacture of the paper, and people around here saved almost every scrap of fabrics to sell as rags at the paper mill. Rags finally became such a medium of local exchange that while those who preferred were usually paid in cash, others traded their rags for food or clothing, whichever they needed most.

"My college days were full of excitement, as well as hard work. I graduated from the University of Georgia in 1896 in Civil Engineering, and in 1897 in Electrical Engineering. I was the only one in my class to graduate in the latter subject. Henry Grady, Jr, was one of my schoolmates during the college days. He was a fine boy.

"In 1896 after Roentgen discovered the X-Ray, we made the first X-Ray picture ever made in the south in our classroom at the university, under Professor Patterson. That same year we also made equipment for sending wireless telegraphy at the university. When I left college in 1896, I went in business for myself. I think 13 the little electric shop that I originated then was perhaps one of the first ever opened in Athens.

"Did I tell you that my Civil Engineering course was under Dr. Strahan? He was civil engineer for the county at the time, as well as an instructor at the university. He had charge of supervising the country roads as far back as the pick-and-shovel days. Those

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were the days when every property owner was called on to meet on a certain date to work the roads going through their own property. Dr. Strahan was instrumental in introducing plans for having the public roads worked at the expense of State and county. It was while he was on a trip to Europe and I was acting as County Engineer pro-tem in his absence, that the ruling went into effect.

"I sold my business here and entered business in Atlanta. That proved a failure. I returned to Athens and with one or two of my brothers and a few others, helped to put up a machine for making cement blocks, and we also installed a rock crusher. These blocks we made were the kind used in building houses. One or two of the houses made of our blocks are still standing here, and there are several elsewhere. I guess we were too far ahead of the times with that enterprise, so we gave it up.

"Work with the Bell Telephone Company drew me back to Atlanta. I have helped to run telephone lines from New Orleans to New York. I was working for them when the first underground cables, or wires, were laid from New York to Philadelphia, and when the tube was laid under the Hudson River.

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"I was receiving an excellent salary and wouldn't have given up that work but for the fact that I was taken critically ill while in New York. As soon as I recovered sufficiently to make the trip, my wife and I returned to Athens to live. Soon after our return our daughter was born. She is our only child.

"As I told you, I had been sending my savings to my brother here to invest in real estate for me. I have always been interested in real estate, and I guess I've been active in the business for at least 40 years.

"Getting to my experiences in this business of renting; we have some amusing as well as trying, experiences with negro tenants. One of our houses has two large rooms and two small ones. A negro man, his wife and five or six children lived in two of the rooms; a man

and his wife occupied the other large room, and a girl rented the remaining small room. The girl hadn't paid her rent in 3 months. Every time Miss Annie went there to collect the rent she was always told the girl was out. She never could find her in, so one night I took it upon myself to catch her in. I went there and found three negro women sitting in that one little room. when I asked for the girl, they insisted, 'We don't know where she is. She ain't been here all day.' When I came home and told Miss Annie, she said, 'Why Ed, you should have known better. Why didn't you try some other scheme to find out which one she was instead of just asking them?' That's just one of the tricks that have been played on us.

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"A white family was living in one of our houses, and whenever we went to collect the rent the man always had some excuse for not paying it. We were forced to take steps toward making him move out, so we gave him 60 days notice. Still he didn't get out. We issued a warrant, and he was to move by a stipulated date or the bailiff would clear the house. A man who said he was from out of town came to me for a house, so we rented him that one. In the lease it was plainly stated that he was to move in after the other family moved out. He said that he told the man who was living in the house that he was ready to move in and that he had already paid me some rent in advance. One day when he called on me, I asked him if the other family had moved out. He informed me they had not, but that he had moved in with them. I showed him the clause in his lease that read: 'You are to move in only when the other family now occupying the house has moved out.' I went straight to the bailiff. 'I'm paying you to do this work.' I reminded him, 'Why don't you do something about that warrant?' He went out to the house and put the furniture out in the yard. When I learned where he had placed it, I told him that would not do for no one could move in the house as long as the furniture stayed on the premises. Then the bailiff moved it on the right-of-way across the railroad tracks. The railroad agent ordered me to move the goods from their property for the owners of the furniture could sue the railroad company if a train came along and set fire to it. So the bailiff finally put the furniture in the 16 street, as he should have done in the first place. It sat until the last piece had rotted down or was

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stolen. The owner never moved a piece of it. The funny part about the whole business was that the man who came here to rent the house was a brother of the woman who already lived there, and he was living there with them when he first came to see me about renting the house. They thought that by his making a new lease and paying the current rent they wouldn't have to pay up the back rent, or get out either. Well, they couldn't pull that stunt on us.

“An apartment in the house back of our home here was rented to a couple. The woman was an artist and the son had what seemed to be a good job. They got about three months in arrears with their rent. When we felt that we had kept them as long as we could we asked them to move. Often when we went to their apartment we saw that they had much better food than we did. The woman put up an awful pitiful story in which she told us that her friends had sent in the food. I found out that a missionary society in one of the local churches was feeding this couple, and when a woman from this society called me to inquire about their financial troubles, I told her that I believed they were making enough to take care of their own expenses, and I couldn't understand why they were in such a jam. She asked if we would be willing to pay the expenses of moving them. Now, I was glad to spend, say two dollars, to get them out, so I could rent the apartment to someone who would pay. I was surprised when the woman from the missionary society sent a 17 large van to move them, for they were living in one of our furnished apartments and they only had about three or four suitcases and a few personal things. The bill rendered me for the use of that moving van was \$18. We investigated, and found they moved to Anderson, South Carolina, after we had been given the impression we were to pay for moving them to another apartment in Athens.

“At that time we had a joint telephone in the house, and each of the three families paid a third of the bill. When that month's bill came in we found that this man had made a long distance call to Chicago and charged it to our phone. That cured us of any kind of joint

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telephone arrangements. On the other hand the people in the other two apartments in that house never gave us a minute's trouble.

"Negroes are funny people. For instance, they only work by the day or by the week, and when a member of one of their families get sick, they just won't pay the rent. After they are well again and start back paying current rental, they have already forgotten about the back rent that they owe. It's hard to make them understand that it's still an obligation. However, they are not all like that. One old negress lived in one of our houses 30 years and never missed a payment. She raised a large family and when they were all grown her sons built a three-room house and put her in it.

"All of our downtown store buildings are located in the 18 best part of the business section, and we don't have to take any foolishness from the tenants. If they complain about the rent, all they have to do is move on out. We never have any trouble keeping those stores rented. Several of the tenants in those stores have been with us 25 years. However, we do have several small stores scattered over town that are hard to keep occupied. At the present time we don't have a single building, store, or residence, vacant. I don't think that's bad for 67 pieces of property to be kept rented.

"I'm not trying to give the impression that we own all of this property. We only have an interest in some of the buildings, and for various parcels or it I am administrator, agent, or guardian. Others of the parcels are our own individual property. We only have one-fifth interest in some of the property, for which I act as renting agent.

"When we have to make lots of improvements to please the tenant, we have to raise their rent, but when there is not much to be done beyond the inevitable repairs, the rent remains the same. We haven't followed the up and down trends of rental charges throughout the years. Our charge for negro houses averages 50¢ a room per week, plus the water bill which amounts to about 10¢ per room each week.

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"There is one thing Negroes will not do; that is, when anything happens to a water pipe they never report it. They just let the water run. We have had to pay as much as \$20 for one water 19 bill, caused by a pipe that had burst and which had not been reported to us. Dances at negro houses often end in fights, and they do so much damage to our property that we have had to pay as high as \$60 for repairs after one of their frolics.

"We are subject to call, night or day. During the worst of the storm yesterday I had to go to a building that had sprung a leak in the roof. I would not delay, for after the rain ceased I wouldn't have been able to locate the leak. Some property owners have their repairs done only when they can't keep tenants any other way, but we try to keep up our repairs as we go along, just as fast as we can after learning of the need." His eyes twinkled as he said: "In one of my apartment houses there are three families that I believe must take turns about staying awake at night to think up things they can ask me to do. You can't please some people, no matter how hard you try.

"Our rental prices range from \$2 to \$100 per month. Five store spaces in one building rent for \$95 a month each. On some of the property the taxes and insurance run so high that we can hardly realize any profit from the rents.

"People from all walks of life will beat you if they can. You have to be on your guard at all times. A woman who was living in one of our houses went one night to call on an acquaintance across the railroad tracks. On the way back home she fell and skinned her leg. She sued us, telling the lawyer that her injury was incurred in a fall through a broken plank in the house she was 20 renting from us. She had broken a plank in the kitchen to prove her point. Of course, we made her move. She lost the case.

"There was another family we had to put out, and understand these people I'm talking about were white people. They hadn't paid any rent in so long that we had to get out a warrant for the bailiff to put them out. Every time he went to that house and asked the children where their mother was, he was told, 'she's sick in bed and can't see anybody.'

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That went on until we finally sent a doctor out there to find out what was the trouble with the woman. He reported that she was as well as anyone. Did you know that as long as you or a member of your family is sick in bed, even pretending they are ill, no law under the sun can be enforced to make them vacate rented property? We only send the bailiff with a dispossessory warrant, as a last resort.

"My sister-in-law said to me one day, 'Ed, there's a family in one of my houses that I haven't heard from in some time. Will you find out what's the trouble?' I suggested that perhaps she had better go herself and investigate. She found that family in an awful condition. The man was drinking up everything he made and letting his family suffer. My mister-in-law went to the stores and bought what food and clothing they needed and carried it back to that poor woman and her children. This went on for a year - providing not only the rent, but their food and clothing as well. Finally we did succeed in getting them out, but before they moved that man had the audacity to ask me to let them move in another of our houses that was vacant at the time. 'Not a chance in the world,' 21 I told him, 'What do you take me for?'

"Don't think for a minute that all our tenants are like the ones I have pictured to you. They are not by any means. The renting game is like a mincemeat pie," he said with a twinkle in his eye, "for it's either good or bad. We complain about our piece of bad pie, but there's really not enough said about the good ones who pay their rent promptly and don't complain about this or that all the time. A professor and his family lived in one of our houses for 18 months before I ever saw him or contacted him in any way, except that as regular as the second day of the month came around, his check came to us through the mails. Miss Annie had rented to him and that accounts for why I had not met him sooner.

"We make it a point never to rent to undesirable people if we can help it. We investigate the character of the prospective tenant before the lease is signed, but even then we get bit some times. In one of our apartments last year there was a person whose uncle was awfully attentive to her. We were suspicious of the two without a definite reason, so when



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this woman decided to move before the lease expired, we were delighted to see them go pleasantly and without hard feelings.

“Now, please don't misunderstand us. We are not as hard boiled as some of these things I've been telling you might picture us. We help our tenants just as much as we can, but after all, we didn't go into this game just because we love it. The business of renting was thrust upon us. We couldn't get an agent to look after 22 it to suit us, so we decided to take it in charge ourselves. There's not enough volume in our rents to warrant maintaining an office downtown and to hire a secretary to do the typing and book-keeping, so we do the work ourselves right here in our own dining room at home.

“To help me with the repairs, we employ a man the year around who is a pretty good carpenter, plumber, and electrician. I do a good deal of my electric work. The only reason I hire any of that done is that when I was a young man I fell from a building I was repairing and broke my leg just above the ankle, and since then I've had lots of trouble with that limb. Sometimes I'm in bed for 6 weeks at a time as a result of that fall.

“There is one of the downtown buildings in which I own one-fifth interest, that has been involved in five lawsuits that I have brought in order to try to clear the titles, and they are not cleared yet.

“Yes, indeed, we rent to lots of mighty fine people and Miss Annie and I enjoy having every one of them. We are proud of having that class of tenants.

“In conclusion let me say that as to renting property; we live with it, eat with it (at this very dining table), and we sleep and dream about it. We sleep 4 hours and work with our property the other 20 in 'most every day. That's the life of people who rent real estate.”